Laurenz Guenther

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Contact

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Main Research and Teaching Fields

Political Economics, Experimental Economics, Behavioral Economics

References

Salvatore Nunnari	Professor of Economics (Bocconi) salvatore.nunnari@unibocconi.it
Florian Zimmermann	Professor of Economics (Bonn and IZA) florian.zimmermann@briq-institute.org
Massimo Morelli	Professor of Political Science and Economics (Bocconi) massimo.morelli@unibocconi.it

Job Market Paper

Political Representation Gaps in Europe

Populists are often defined as those who claim that they fill "political representation gaps" -differences between the policymaking by established parties and the "popular will." Research has largely neglected to what extent this claim is correct. I study descriptively whether representation gaps exist and their relationship with populism. To this end, I analyze the responses of citizens and parliamentarians from 27 European countries to identical survey policy questions, which I compile and verify to be indicative of voting in referendums. I find that policymaking represents the economic attitudes of citizens well. However, I document that the average parliamentarian is about 1SD more culturally liberal than the national mean voter. This cultural representation gap is systematic in four ways: i) it arises on nearly all cultural issues, ii) in nearly all countries, iii) nearly all established parties are more culturally liberal than the national mean voter, and iv) all major demographic groups tend to be more conservative than their parliamentarians. Moreover, I find that demographic differences between voters and parliamentarians or lack of political knowledge cannot fully account for representation gaps. Finally, I show that right-wing populists fill the cultural representation gap.

Link to the paper

Working Papers

Inherited Inequality and the Dilemma of Meritocracy (with Timo Freyer)
R&R at *Experimental Economics*

In meritocratic societies, inequality is considered just if it reflects factors within but not outside individuals' control. However, individuals often benefit differentially from *other* people's efforts. Such *passive inequality* is simultaneously just and unjust by meritocratic standards, confronting meritocrats with a dilemma. We conducted an experiment with a representative US sample to investigate how people deal with this dilemma. In the experiment, impartial spectators redistribute payments between pairs of individuals. We vary whether initial payments result from luck or effort and whether spectators redistribute between individuals who worked themselves or individuals who benefited from the work of real-life friends. We find that spectators treat inequality based on the efforts of individuals' friends as if individuals had worked themselves, and very different from inequality resulting from differential luck. This indicates that most people accept inequality if it is merited at some stage, which may explain opposition against redistributive policies.
Link to the paper

Is History Repeating Itself? Populism in the Weimar Republic and Modern Germany (with Paul Behler)

The recent rise of far-right populist parties is often compared to the rise of Fascism in the 20th century which ended up destroying democratic institutions. This paper analyzes the abolition of the Weimar Republic by the Nazis from the perspective of populism and compares it to the rise of modern populism. We measure populism by analyzing the parliamentary speeches of parties from the Weimar Republic and modern Germany using an established dictionary method. Our main finding is that modern Germany follows a similar trajectory as the Weimar Republic. While the general level of populism was stable over time, both states saw a reversal in which parties were populist. In their early years, left-wing parties were the most populist while right-wing parties became the most populist later.
Link to the paper

Correcting Misperceptions Can Increase Anti-Immigration Attitudes

Anti-immigration attitudes are widespread in many countries. However, recent research has also documented that many natives overestimate the number of immigrants in their countries. As a result, misperceptions have become viewed as an important explanatory factor for anti-immigration attitudes. This paper provides evidence that conflicts with this interpretation. A survey among a representative sample of 2,104 Germans reveals that anti-immigration attitudes are mostly driven by a desire for fewer asylum seekers. Moreover, while I replicate that Germans overestimate the share of immigrants in general, I also show that they strongly underestimate the number of asylum seekers. Finally, I perform an information provision experiment and find that eliminating the misperception regarding asylum seekers increases opposition to immigration.
Link to the paper

Would Europeans Accept Immigrants If They Knew Them?

Most Europeans demand lower immigration rates. Should politicians follow this demand? The answer to this question depends on whether the anti-immigration attitudes of voters result from negatively biased beliefs. While it has been shown that

Europeans perceive the characteristics of immigrants as more negative than they really are, it is unknown whether Europeans would accept immigrants if they held correct beliefs. This paper proposes a method of estimating the immigration attitudes that people with biased beliefs would hold if they were well-informed about the characteristics of immigrants. I apply this method in the context of the European refugee crisis. To do so, I combine data from a vignette study in which 15,000 subjects, representative of the population of 15 European countries, decided on whether to accept or reject hypothetical asylum seekers with data on the characteristics of real asylum seekers. I find that if Europeans had been well informed, majorities in all countries would have rejected most asylum seekers who came to Europe during the refugee crisis. This suggests that anti-asylum seeker attitudes are not mainly driven by biased beliefs.

Link to the paper

Selected Work in Progress

Do Political Representation Gaps Cause Populism? (with Salvatore Nunnari)

Political Representation Gaps and Trust (with Massimo Morelli)

Current Positions and Affiliations

| 2023 – | Postdoctoral Researcher, **IGIER–Bocconi University** |
| | Fellow, **Institute for European Policymaking** |

Education

2023	Ph.D. in Economics, **Bonn Graduate School of Economics**
2019	Master of Science in Economics, **University of Bonn**
2017	Bachelor of Science in Economics, **University of Bonn**

Awards, Scholarships and Grants

2023	Research Grant by Institute for European Policymaking (€5,000)
2022	Selten Grant by the Cluster of Excellence ECONtribute (€10,000)
	Grant by the Institute for Applied Microeconomics at Bonn University (€3,000)
	Grant by the MacroFinance and MacroHistory Lab at Bonn University (€2,000)
2021	Selten Grant by the Cluster of Excellence ECONtribute (€8,000)
2020	Research grant by the BGSE and briq Institute (€4,000)
	Award for Excellence in Teaching (Tutorenpreis)
2019	Research grant by the BGSE (€2,000)
2019–2022	Scholarship from the briq Institute
2018–2022	Scholarship from the German Research Foundation ("Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft")
2017	Research grant by the Institute for Applied Microeconomics at Bonn University (€1,000)

Presentations

Selected	Seminar Series on Economic Institutions at DG ECFIN of the European Commission (2024)
	CEPR-Kiel Workshop in Berlin: "How can mainstream parties best fight populism? (2024)
	Annual Research Conference of the European Commission (2023)
	FAIR Online Workshop at NHH Bergen (2022)
	Young Economist Symposium at Yale (2022)
Previous	Brussels, Berlin, Bocconi, Bonn, Vallendar, Frankfurt, Bochum, Hannover, Paris, Cologne, Uppsala, Basel, Sundsvall, Essen, Mannheim

Professional Service

Refereeing	Economic Policy, Social Choice and Welfare, Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization, The Economic Journal

Teaching Experience

2024	Supervision of Bachelor Thesis, **Bocconi University**
2022–2023	Teaching Assistant for "Introduction to Economics", **University of Bonn**
2021–2022	Supervision of Master Thesis, **University of Bonn**
2019–2021	Teaching Assistant for "Introduction into Economics", **University of Bonn**

Miscellaneous

Nationality	German
Human Languages	German (native), English (fluent), Italian (basic)
Computer Languages	R (fluent), Python (fluent), oTree (fluent), z-Tree (fluent)